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INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE 6842
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH IMMEDIATE 0999
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 1443
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 2561

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 003397

SIPDIS

BANGKOK FOR REFCOORD, GENEVA FOR RMA

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: TENSE RELATIONS BETWEEN UNHCR BEIJING AND THE PRC:
UIGHURS AND NORTH KOREANS TO BLAME

REF: A. BEIJING 316

[1](#)B. PHNOM PENH 926

Classified By: POL External Unit Chief Eric Barboriak.
Reason 1.4 (c) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) UNHCR Beijing's already delicate relationship with the MFA was "stretched to its limit" due to incidents involving asylum seekers unrelated to UNHCR Beijing, according to a UNHCR Beijing official. The MFA strongly objected to what it perceived was UNHCR Beijing's direct involvement in efforts to prevent the forced deportation of five North Koreans reportedly arrested in Guangxi and now in Jilin and insisted UNHCR assisted in the escape from China of 22 Uighurs who recently claimed asylum with UNHCR in Cambodia. UNHCR Beijing predicted a very difficult and tenuous year ahead in their interaction with the MFA. Given current tensions with the MFA, UNHCR would prefer to wait until early 2010 before formally requesting exit permission for the family of four North Koreans currently living in Beijing under its care.
End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On December 17, PolOff met with UNHCR Beijing Associate Field Officer Severine Weber (protect) to discuss the next steps for the family of four North Korean asylum seekers under UNHCR care (ref A) who received approval from DHS/USCIS on December 15 for resettlement in the United States. (Following past practice, Post submitted a nonpaper to MFA December 17 requesting exit permission for these cases.) Weber informed PolOff December 17 that while UNHCR would provide a Note Verbale to MFA (in response to MFA's December 17 request for information on the four North Koreans) noting that the North Koreans were accepted for resettlement, UNHCR wished to wait until early 2010 to formally request exit permission.

SEPARATE BUT RELATED REFUGEE CASES

[1](#)3. (C) Weber told PolOff that UNHCR decided to delay the request for exit permission because the MFA was "extremely angry" with the Beijing UNHCR office. According to Weber, UNHCR Beijing's already delicate relationship with the MFA had been "stretched to its limit" in the past few months due to two unrelated incidences. In mid-September, PRC authorities reportedly detained five North Koreans in Guangxi province near China's border with Vietnam and subsequently moved them to Jilin province in China's Northeast. According to Weber, the MFA strongly objected to what it perceived was UNHCR's direct involvement in efforts to halt the deportation

of the five North Koreans. (Mission China had urged PRC authorities on October 13 and December 7 to not forcibly repatriate these individuals to North Korea. The ROK had reportedly made similar representations.) Weber also stated that the MFA believed UNHCR Beijing had a role in assisting the 22 Uighurs from China who arrived in Cambodia in mid-December to claim asylum with UNHCR Phnom Penh (Ref B). Though Weber affirmed that UNHCR Beijing was not involved in the Uighur cases, she reported that the MFA had made "heated phone calls" to UNHCR, demanding that UNHCR Beijing staff admit their complicit role in helping the 22 "criminals" escape to Cambodia.

¶4. (C) China had made appeals to UNHCR Geneva for the immediate return of the Uighurs to China, Weber said, without a refugee determination assessment. She noted, however, that Cambodia was a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and had made public commitments to abide by its obligation under the convention. Nevertheless, Weber was concerned that the Cambodian government's resolve would waiver during PRC Vice President Xi Jinping's December 20-22 trip there as he would almost certainly bring up the Uighurs during his discussions with Cambodian government leaders.

GOLDBERG